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ABSTRACT

Across the United States, School/Community-Based Management (SCBM), also called site-based management, is gaining support. The effects of SCBM in some Pacific-region schools are detailed. SCBM arose in response to mandates giving decision-making powers to the people who have to carry out educational initiatives. One evaluation of SCBM implementation in two elementary school in Hawaii revealed that SCBM was being successfully implemented there, with success arising from the process used to work through problems. It is recommended that schools considering SCBM have the principal's unwavering support, that the principal's leadership style be facilitative, and that the climate be collaborative and trusting. External evaluations of other schools in Hawaii that implemented SCBM revealed its significant impact on school decision-making practices, although its effects on school-management practices and autonomy was mixed. A Board of Education survey of 240 participants in a state SCBM conference indicated that consensus-based decision-making appeared to be working well at SCBM schools. SCBM allows schools to respond to the unique personality of their communities, and gives teachers, parents, students, and other community members a larger voice in decision-making at their local schools. (RJM)

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PREL BRIEFING PAPER

PACIFIC RESOURCES FOR EDUCATION AND LEARNING

School/Community-Based Management Revisited In The Pacific

by Stan Koki*

Across the nation and elsewhere, including the Pacific region, School/Community-Based Management (SCBM), also known as site-based management, is gaining support as a means to improve schooling. In Hawai'i, this decentralization initiative originated as a legislative mandate to give decision-making powers to those who have to carry out these initiatives. The 1989 law requires that parents, teachers, principals, students, support staff, and other community members—six role groups—become part of the decision-making group.

To date, more than 84 percent of Hawai'i's public schools have decided to implement SCBM by submitting a Letter of Intent, and 65 percent have submitted a Proposal to Implement. Considering that the process of becoming an SCBM school is voluntary, this high rate of acceptance by schools is astonishing.

Elsewhere in the Pacific region, interest in SCBM has grown. In Guam, Harman Loop Elementary School has been designated a pilot site to implement the model. Chuuk, Federated States of Micronesia, has over the years built the foundation for the implementation of SCBM. Principals and community members in Yap State have also expressed interest in SCBM.

In August 1996, conversations on SCBM were initiated in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) with policymakers, central office staff, principals, PTA officials, parents, and community members. These discussions are based on Hawai'i's SCBM model. The work is in support of the CNMI public school system's movement toward institutionalizing plans to increase the community's direct involvement in the schools. Although the concept is relatively new in the CNMI, interest is growing steadily.

Tom Camacho, president of CNMI's PTA Council, said that SCBM based on the principle of decentralization is likely to yield "more effective policies." Under the present system, all policies come from the Public School System and the Board of Education. "Things that are devised from the grass roots level could be more effective because they are based on the unique needs of the school," Camacho said.

As SCBM gains greater acceptance in the Pacific region and more school communities begin to explore the advantages and disadvantages of the model for possible adoption or adaptation at their individual school sites, their

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need for current information on the implementation of SCBM becomes more pressing. This policy brief summarizes recent information that has become available on the implementation and evaluation of SCBM.

PREL Evaluation of SCBM

In 1992, the Pacific Region Educational Laboratory (PREL) collaborated on a formative evaluation of SCBM with the Hawai'i Business Roundtable (HBR) and the Evaluation Section of the Planning and Evaluation Branch of the Hawai'i State Department of Education. The evaluation focused on two elementary schools that were deeply engaged in the implementation of the SCBM process—Wai'alae and Mā'ili.

The procedures used for this evaluation were aligned with the philosophy of shared responsibility, shared decision-making, and collaboration as promoted by SCBM. The evaluation was conducted by an Evaluation Team,consisting of representatives from the collaborating agencies. The HBR provided $35,000 to fund the evaluation through a one-year contract with PREL.

Members of the Evaluation Team met with each school, providing an opportunity for each school community to give input toward the design of its evaluation. Each school identified its SCBM areas of focus, evaluation goals in relation to the SCBM focus, and critical evaluation questions.

The input from each school was organized and interpreted in terms of the evaluative process. The SCBM focus and goals were defined, and the critical questions were converted to evaluation questions. The critical questions voiced by the school community often were broad, general research questions as opposed to evaluation questions. The Evaluation Team examined these research questions and, when appropriate, modified them to focus on the evaluation of an important identified area.

The evaluation questions were then categorized into four areas that guided the design for evaluating SCBM. These areas included: (1) School/Community Connections, (2) Governance/Organizational Systems, (3) Teaching/Learning Situations, and (4) Student Learning.

Because the evaluation was conducted during the first year of implementation, and because the research indicated that impact on teaching and student learning is minimal in the first year of implemented change, the project only focused on the school/community connections and governance/organizational systems.

The evaluation revealed that SCBM was being successfully implemented in two demographically-different schools. Both schools found that successful SCBM implementation is not contingent on lack of conflict. Rather, it is dependent on the process that is used to work through the issues and problems. The identification of key success factors for the implementation of SCBM was one of the major outcomes of the evaluation. These factors were present at both Wai'alae and Mā'ili elementary schools. Certain existing conditions, characteristics of the school principals, and guidelines contributed to the successful implementation of SCBM.

It should be noted that these key success factors addressed only two categories that are related to implementation: School/Community Connections and Governance/Organizational Systems. During the evaluation, it was premature to conclude whether the key success factors for implementation would impact the categories of Teaching/Learning Situations or Student Learning.

Getting Started

When a school is considering SCBM, the following key success factors need to be recognized:

- The principal is instrumental in initiating SCBM.
- The leadership style of the principal needs to be facilitative.
- A collaborative, trusting climate must be established to successfully introduce SCBM.

Effective communication must occur with all role groups from the very beginning of the SCBM introduction.

Implementation

During the implementation of SCBM, the six role groups or stakeholders acknowledged the following as key success factors in the areas of School/Community Connections and Governance/Organizational Systems:

- Shared Vision
- Open Communication
- Respect
- Trust
- Collaboration
- Empowerment
- Operational Guidelines (bylaws)
- Continued support for change by the district and state offices

One of the strongest findings of this study was that SCBM provides a flexible structure that responds to the unique personality of the community. Schools can be custom-made for the community they serve.

According to the evaluation reports, "To spend any time in either of these schools and observe or participate in their SCBM process is to experience educational restructuring beyond the rhetoric. The State Department of Education must continue to make systemic changes to support SCBM because these schools have left the traditional mode of operation and they will not be returning. Other schools are following close behind."

Far West Laboratory Evaluation of SCBM

In 1995, the Far West Laboratory (now WestEd) was contracted to conduct an external evaluation of the first nine schools to "pioneer" SCBM in Hawai'i. To evaluate these SCBM schools, the Far West Laboratory developed a framework built on the theory and assumptions underlying school-based management initiatives, generally, and SCBM, specifically. The framework anticipated certain outcomes and impacts from decentralized decision-making that would ultimately result in improved student learning.

To capture the unique experiences and context of each school, while still assessing the overall success of SCBM, four key features were reflected in the evaluation design and methods: (1) a qualitative, ethnographically-oriented case-study approach at each school; (2) evidence-driven analysis; (3) common themes within each area of impact suggested by the evaluation framework; and (4) congruency with SCBM philosophy through a collaborative evaluation approach involving the schools and Department of Education.

The evaluation data revealed that SCBM had a significant impact on school decision-making practices. However, its impact on school management practices and autonomy was mixed, and sustaining the decision-making processes begun under SCBM was a major issue for many schools. Few schools had developed the structures and routines to monitor their progress or the indicators to know when their goals were met.

Another finding of this evaluation was that SCBM decision-making and enhanced school-community connections are strongly linked. In addition to the increased parent and community involvement and support that the nine

schools expected, other outcomes were achieved, often in combination with other school programs or initiatives, such as the Parent-Community Networking Center.

A third finding was that, despite substantial progress achieved, adjustments were still needed to make SCBM a strong vehicle for school improvement. At times the connections between SCBM and school improvement were somewhat loose or uneven. The few schools that had made substantial and coherent schoolwide improvements, particularly in curriculum and instruction, were able to integrate SCBM and school improvement with a clear school vision and mission shared by all members of the school-community.

A fourth finding was that, although difficult to isolate, SCBM was associated with some positive outcomes for key individuals--parents, teachers, and students. Parents at all of the nine schools appeared "extremely confident and satisfied with their children's schools" and confidence was growing. Measures of teacher work satisfaction also showed improvement. At nearly all schools, collaboration improved among teachers and other staff implementing SCBM, and most teachers were committed to SCBM goals and activities.

1996 Board of Education Survey Report

In October 1996, a survey report on the implementation of SCBM in Hawai'i's schools was released. The report presented findings from a survey that was conducted at the request of the Board of Education. It involved more than 240 respondents who attended the February 1996 State SCBM Conference in Honolulu. Ninety-six SCBM schools were involved in the survey. Respondents included 42 parents, 66 teachers, 58 administrators, 22 classified staff, 15 students, 26 community members, and others.

Results of the survey indicated that consensus-based decision-making appeared to be working well at many SCBM schools. In general, SCBM council representatives appeared to be doing a "pretty good" job of consulting with people in their role groups. Access to information about SCBM council activities was adequate.

These results also indicated that each SCBM school attempted to translate the concept of broad-based participation into practice in a way that was workable for that school. Depending on the people involved, the school's culture, and other factors, broad-based participation in the school and the extent of "off-limit" areas varied among SCBM schools.

The report noted that, to date, "many schools appear to have focused their energies on establishing the SCBM process and on trying to make it work," with varying degrees of success. A few schools have evolved to the point where they were able to begin focusing more attention on the content and purpose of SCBM, dealing with issues related to student learning and attainment of the school's vision and mission.

Lessons Learned on SCBM

Although there have been great variations in the ways that schools in the Pacific region are implementing SCBM, and evaluation findings of the process are still not conclusive, there is some evidence that SCBM is working in Hawai'i and that schools are now focusing on turning decentralized management into better results in the classroom. The Hawai'i evaluation studies point to the strengths of SCBM. SCBM has given teachers, parents, students, and other community members a larger voice in decision-making at their local schools. A key ingredient is leadership from a facilitative and supportive principal.

The movement toward SCBM represents a major change effort. Like other change efforts, the successful implementation of the process takes time, resources, and human will. The transition to SCBM, when successful, is both pervasive and deep, requiring change in almost all aspects of the school—structures, roles, systems, instructional

practices, human resource practices, and the skills and knowledge of participants. Implementing such a change effort is a gradual process that involves introducing and refining changes until all aspects of the organization support the new way of doing business at the school site.

SCBM is not a destination but a journey, and the process is evolutionary. It is a potentially valuable tool for engaging the talents and enthusiasm of more of a school's stakeholders than traditional, top-down governance systems. Once in place, SCBM empowers schools to better address the needs of students, especially if a "high-involvement" model is followed.

While the needs of each school differ, SCBM still continues to be a viable option for school improvement or educational restructuring in the Pacific region that will enhance school/community involvement and increase student achievement.

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